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**STATEMENT ON THE NATION'S REPORT CARD:
*Writing 2011, Grades 8 and 12***

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As a teacher educator and professional development consultant, I am dedicated to improving literacy education for all students. *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011* provides important information about the writing proficiency of students in 8th and 12th grades. The report card results also offer educators the opportunity to discuss this research and consider ways to improve the writing performance of all students.

When I served as senior project consultant to the NAEP 2011 Writing Framework, I was excited by the definition of writing that guided this assessment: "Writing is a complex, multifaceted, and purposeful act of communication that is accomplished in a variety of environments, under various constraints of time, and with a variety of language resources and technological tools." This definition presents writing as a flexible, generative, decision-making process and reflects the current perspectives and practices of writing instructors, from elementary through graduate school. Rather than focusing on traditional genres or modes of writing, NAEP looks at how well students accomplish writing tasks for communicative purposes (to persuade, to explain, and to convey experience—real or imagined) to specific audiences.

With NAEP's administration of its first computer-based writing assessment, we gain insight into the ways 8th-grade and 12th-grade students use technology to compose their writing. For example, we learn that eighth-grade "[s]tudents whose teachers more frequently asked them to use the computer to draft and revise their writing scored higher than those whose teachers did so less frequently. Students whose teachers never asked them to draft and revise their writing on a computer scored the lowest." We also learn that 12th-grade students "who always or almost always used a computer to edit their writing scored higher on average than students who reported doing so very often, sometimes, or never or hardly ever."

These findings support the importance of integrating computers into writing instruction. Teachers need to show students how to use word-processing features (e.g., cut, copy, paste, spell

check, thesaurus) effectively and efficiently to plan, draft, revise, and edit their writing. For example, both 8th-grade and 12th-grade students “who used the thesaurus tool more frequently scored higher on average than students who engaged in this action less frequently.” When teachers encourage students to use word-processing features on a regular basis, students learn how computers can facilitate their writing processes and improve their final product.

The findings in *The Nation’s Report Card: Writing 2011* also support the need for schools to provide and ensure access to computers for all students. The data on eighth-graders show that “[i]n 2011, larger percentages of students who were eligible for school lunch than those who were not eligible had teachers who reported never or sometimes asking students to use computers to draft and review their writing.” Accessibility and availability of technology are essential to providing high quality writing instruction for all students. Students who are skilled in using technology tools in writing will be more successful in school, the workplace, and in society.

The Nation’s Report Card: Writing 2011 offers educators resources for professional development. Educators can use the NAEP writing rubrics to guide discussions on their own criteria for assessing students’ writing at various grade levels and in various subject areas. In my writing methods courses and professional development workshops, I present examples of students’ writing from NAEP’s *Basic*, *Proficient*, and *Advanced* achievement level ranges. I remind teachers that students had 30 minutes to write; therefore, these responses should be considered first drafts, not polished pieces of writing. Using the NAEP six-point rubrics, teachers individually score the writing, share their scores, and then compare their scores with the NAEP ratings. We look at how students used Development of Ideas, Organization of Ideas, and Language Facility and Conventions in their writing. Our lively conversations lead to a common and deeper understanding of these three features of writing, the rubrics, and the ratings.

By examining NAEP tasks, educators can see how the writing purpose and audience are presented to students. Through NAEP’s computer-based assessment, writing tasks are now presented in multiple ways, including printed text, photographs, audio, video, and/or animation. Because the tasks are delivered through a variety of modes, students may find the prompts more engaging and may be inspired to write more interesting ideas and make more effective language choices. If educators create prompts for writing assessments beyond their classrooms and/or subject areas, they discover the challenges of crafting prompts that are not based on specific content-area knowledge or the reading comprehension of texts. By reviewing the NAEP tasks, educators also become aware of how demographics and issues of fairness, access, and bias may affect students’ understanding and responses to the tasks.

Educators who participate in the development of writing assessments in their school, district, and/or state can use the NAEP Writing Assessment as a model to inform their decision-making processes. For example, in Montana, we have collaborated with classroom teachers, teacher educators, state education agencies, and colleges and universities to develop a holistic rubric and writing prompts for the Montana University System Writing Assessment (MUSWA). From 2001 to 2012, this voluntary program provided workshops across the state that trained educators (K-12 classroom teachers, pre-service teachers, and college composition instructors) to apply this rubric to 11th-grade students’ persuasive writing. For the past eight years, Montana colleges and universities have used these scores in admission and placement decisions. The quantitative and

qualitative results of the MUSWA (available at www.mus.edu/writingproficiency/index.asp) attest to the value of collaborative professional development that directly links writing assessment to writing instruction.

The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011 and its related websites are essential resources for educators committed to the improvement of students' writing proficiencies. As we discuss this report, we can reflect on the instructional strategies that effectively teach students to become competent, confident writers. We can also make informed, research-based decisions about educational policies and advocate for increased technological resources in our schools. With the implementation of Common Core State Standards in many states, educators may wish to consider how NAEP writing assessments are related to the Common Core. By engaging educators, parents, policymakers, and the public in conversations about literacy, we share responsibility and support the education of all students—for today and for the future.